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House votes restrictions on Nicaragua covert aid
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The House, in a surprisingly unanimous vote Wednesday, approved a ban on U.S. covert aid to groups trying to overthrow the leftist Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

The 411-0 vote came during debate on the $231.6 billion 1983 defense appropriations bill, which was passed 346-68 a short time later and sent to the Senate for action next week.

The issue was raised by Rep. Thomas Harkin, D-Iowa, who offered an amendment to bar the CIA or Pentagon from supplying any military equipment, training, advice, or support to Nicaraguan exiles seeking to overthrow the government of their Central American country.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Edward Boland, D-Mass., offered a substitute amendment that was approved. Harkin called Boland's amendment ''a little weaker.'' But he said, ''I can live with it.''

Boland's amendment bars U.S. aid to ''any group or individual, not part of a country's armed forces, for the purpose of overthrowing the government of Nicaragua or provoking a military exchange between Nicaragua and Honduras.''

During debate on Harkin's amendment, only Boland and Rep. Robert Dornan, R-Calif., spoke in opposition. ''What is Mr. Harkin's terrorist is my freedom fighter,'' said Dornan.

But the somewhat weaker Boland amendment was approved without dissent.

The New York Times reported Saturday that at least 150 CIA agents are in Honduras helping to mount a paramilitary operation to overthrow the Nicaraguan government, which the administration has charged with filtering Cuban-supplied weapons to leftist insurgents in nearby El Salvador.

President Reagan was asked about the report while in San Jose, Costa Rica, to meet with Costa Rican President Alberto Luis Monge. ''I never discuss matters of national security,'' he replied. Asked if he could confirm the report, Reagan said, ''No, and I doubt if The New York Times can.''

During the House debate, Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., said the CIA involvement was ''no longer speculation'' and said, ''This Congress better go on record getting control of those agencies that persuade the White House to subsitute covert action for policy.''

Rep. John Burton, D-Calif., said, ''If we don't stop the CIA now...we will be involved not only in Nicaragua, but throughout Central America.''

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